



## JOINT PRESS RELEASE

Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President  
and Navajo Nation Office of the Speaker

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
January 20, 2023

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# Navajo Nation leaders announce mask mandate lifted

**WINDOW ROCK, Navajo Nation** — Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren announced in coordination with the Navajo Department of Health and Speaker Pro Tem of the Navajo Nation Council Otto Tso the COVID-19 mask mandate on the Navajo Nation has been lifted effective at 5 p.m. on Friday.

The public health emergency order applies to public spaces, which include the 110 chapters, according to the Navajo Office of Environmental Health and Protection. The order leaves the continued wearing of masks optional for the general public and for all businesses with four exceptions.

“It’s time for the Navajo people to get back to work,” President Nygren said. “It’s time for them to be able to open their chapter houses to conduct local business and to receive services they are asking for and deserve.”

The order states: “This past week ..., the Navajo Nation has encountered 81 cases with a 7-day incidence rate of 51 cases per 100,000 people. The core metric measure of hospital beds is at 1.8%; 3/27 admissions per 100,000 people as of January 18, 2023, which is classified as low risk.”

The indoor mask requirement applies now only to early childhood education, primary and secondary schools, nursing homes, healthcare facilities and those who have COVID-19 symptoms, test positive or were exposed, the order states.

“With the executive mandate being lifted, I want to ensure our people the welfare of our communities, families, and elders is still a top priority. As we move forward, our Nation’s safety will lie directly in our hands, a responsibility that should not be

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taken lightly, so I ask you to continue taking precautionary measures,” said Pro Tem Speaker Otto Tso. “Additionally, I want to thank President Dr. Buu Van Nygren and Vice President Richelle Montoya for taking this step in opening the Navajo Nation. I extend my gratitude towards former President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer for their work in guiding the Navajo Nation through the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

After 1,007 days of requiring masks on the Navajo Nation, the president noted that this is one of the last jurisdictions in the country to lift the mandate that was ordered by the Navajo Department of Health almost three years ago.

Because COVID-19 is not going anywhere and the virus remains in the human environment, President Nygren said it remains individuals’ responsibility to continue healthy habits they learned during the pandemic such as washing hands and being vaccinated.

“Be responsible,” he said. “Mask up if you’ve tested positive. Mask up and take a rapid test if you notice symptoms or suspect you’ve been exposed. We, as a Nation, are much more aware and much more prepared than in April 2020.”

Navajo Nation building occupancy restrictions related to COVID-19 were lifted on Nov. 14, 2022, through a public health order. Today’s order delivers a full reopening of the Navajo Nation.

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Attachment: Public Health Order No. 2023-001 (3 pages)

**PUBLIC HEALTH ORDER  
NAVAJO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
WITH THE  
OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND PROTECTION PROGRAM**

**January 20, 2023**

**Public Health Emergency Order No. 2023-001  
Lifting the Indoor Mask Mandate for the General Public and for all Businesses**

- I. Paragraphs I – III from Public Health Emergency Order No. 2020-004 are included in this Public Health Order, addressing the various Navajo Nation (Nation) authorities related to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.
- II. The intent and purpose of this Public Health Emergency Order No. 2023-001 is to lift the indoor mask mandate for all general public and all businesses, except:
  - a. Early childhood education (i.e., childcare and preschool), primary schools and secondary schools (including school sponsored events held indoors). Schools shall continue to comply with the COVID-19 Safe School Framework and their respective mitigation plans.
  - b. Nursing Homes located within the Navajo Nation and individuals who provide care to the vulnerable population (i.e., elders, immunocompromised and those who have pre-existing conditions).
  - c. Healthcare facilities who require masks pursuant to their individual guidelines, procedures and protocols.
  - d. Individuals with COVID-19 symptoms; who tested positive for COVID-19; or who have been exposed to an individual who tested positive for COVID-19. Recommendations listed below, Section I(d)-(f).
- III. Based on the current information and data analysis of the three-core metrics by physicians, the Navajo Epidemiology Center and relevant stakeholders, the current risk for infection is low which allows for the issuance of this Public Health Emergency Order No. 2023-001, lifting the indoor mask mandate. This past week (January 12-18, 2023), the Navajo Nation has encountered 81 cases with a 7-day incidence rate of 51 cases per 100,000 people. The core metric measurement of hospital beds is at 1.8%; 3.27 admissions per 100,000 people as of January 18, 2023, which is classified as low risk.

**THEREFORE, NOTICE IS GIVEN**, pursuant to the power and authorities set forth under the NDOH enabling legislation (NNC Resolution No. CO-50-14), and the Navajo Nation Public Health State of Emergency Declaration (CEM Resolution No. 20-03-11):

- I. The indoor mask mandate is no longer required within the Navajo Nation for the general public and all businesses, except:

- a. Early childhood education (i.e., childcare and preschool), primary schools and secondary schools (including school sponsored events held indoors). Schools shall continue to comply with the COVID-19 Safe School Framework and their respective mitigation plans
  - b. Nursing Homes located within the Navajo Nation and individuals who provide care to the vulnerable population (i.e., elders, immunocompromised and those who have pre-existing conditions).
  - c. Healthcare facilities who require masks pursuant to their individual guidelines, procedures and protocols.
  - d. Individuals with COVID symptoms (for 10 days from when your symptoms start).
  - e. Individuals who test positive for COVID (for 10 days after receiving a positive test).
  - f. If you have been exposed to a person who tested positive for COVID (for 10 days after you have contact with a person who has COVID).
- II. Mask is defined as a facial covering designed to filter one's breathing through both the nose and mouth. A mask must snugly cover the face around the nose and mouth to prevent the wearer from breathing unfiltered air. May be a commercially-made face mask, or a homemade cloth covering such as those found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/masks.html>

**NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN** that this Order shall not abrogate any disease-reporting requirements (consistent with HIPAA privacy standards).

**NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN** that it is greatly advised that the public take the following preventive precautions to protect against COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses:

1. Avoid contact with people who are sick and avoid crowded areas.
2. Continue washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, or having been in a public place. If soap and water are not available, it is recommended to use hand sanitizer, preferably hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
3. Clean and disinfect your home and surroundings to remove germs: practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces.
4. Children (age 6 months and older) and the vulnerable population are highly encouraged to stay up-to-date on COVID-19 vaccinations and subsequent boosters.
5. All individuals are encouraged to be vaccinated and receive any additional boosters for COVID-19. In order to protect yourself and others the Nation encourages all individuals to stay up to date with all vaccinations recommended by health professionals.

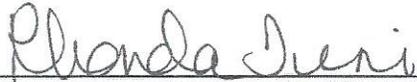
**NOTICE IF FURTHER GIVEN** that this Order shall take effect Friday, January 20, 2023 at 5:00 P.M. (MST) and shall remain in effect until a revised notice is issued through a Public Health Emergency Order.

**ADDITIONAL ADVISORIES AND ORDERS WILL FOLLOW AS CONDITIONS WARRANT. IT IS SO ORDERED ON THIS 20<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF JANUARY, 2023.**



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